

[I'se a Fast 'Oman]

I'sE A FAST 'OMAN

Written By:

Mrs. [Leela?] Bradley

Research Worker

Georgia Writers' Project

Athens -

Edited By:

Mrs. Maggie [B.?] Freeman

Editor

Georgia Writers' Project

Athens -

WPA Area - 6

October 10, 1939

September [18?], 1939

Lisa Johnson (Negro)

[180?] Newton Street

Library of Congress

Athens, Georgia

Midwife

Bradley I'sE A FAST 'OMAN

The ascent to Maria Jones house was the most precarious [feat?] I ever attempted. The main road leading to the foot of the hill was bad enough, dusty, rocky and full of ruts, but when I began to climb, my courage almost failed me. There was a narrow beaten path leading to the top. On each side were woods and grass, while the path itself was nothing but rocks, stones, and washouts.

Finally I reached the top of this incline which brought me to a long flight of steps. These were very rickety, almost hazardous. Finally I reached the top and found myself on the narrow porch.

Maria met me at the [end?] of the steps, "Good evenin', Miss, come right in. Youse had'er hard climb, ain't you?"

"Yes, Maria, but I feel fully repaid for it, for look at that beautiful view you get from here."

And indeed it was lovely. The city spread in the distance like a panorama. The hills and valleys made you feel you were in the mountains, while the breeze 2 [reminded?] you of the seashore.

The house was a ramshackle affair. It was divided into two apartments, and the [two?] rooms on the right were the ones in which Maria and her family, four in all, lived. The front room was the living room and bedroom combined, while the back room was used for sleeping, cooking, and eating. These were both scantily furnished and in great disorder. The room which you [entered?] first contained an iron bed and two pieces of worn carpet for rugs. At the windows were lace curtains that at one time had been of good quality

Library of Congress

but had seen their best days. The only very noticable thing in this room was a radio, turned on with such volume I [could?] scarcely hear my own voice. In this room slept the good-for-nothing daughter, Lisa, and son-in-law, Jake, who was at home hiding from the “vancy” (vagrancy) officer. Jake was very much opposed to work.

Maria and John, her husband, slept, cooked, and ate in the other room. In the beck yard, smoke was rising from around the pot where clothes were boiling, for this was wash day.

We sat on the front-porch to enjoy the breeze while we talked. Maria was fifty-five years old and in appearance she was not very [prepossessing?]. On her head was an old felt hat of Uncle John's, the brim almost 3 completely gone, and through the torn crown bits of her kinky hair were peaking up.

“Honey, please pardon my looks, I'se been washin' ter-day. I don't looks lak dis when I'se on a job. I dresses up den-you know I'se a midwife. Yes, I heps ter bring little babies inter dis world. I ain't had no cases lately, makes me wondah what folks is doin'. Makes me short o' money too, case now dey ain't [sech?] a turrible mount o' money in dat, but its bettern nuthin'.

'tell me something of your life, Maria, and how you happened to become a midwife?" I asked.

“Well”, she began, “I wuz born down here in Washington, Georgia, Wilkes County. I lived there a long time. Den I wanted to git ter a bigger place, so I moved to Athens. Jus been here fifteen years. I married when I wuz twelve,yes, Lawd, I did, dat is to my fust husban. You know I'se had two, Honey. Yes, I'se been married all mah life. I had a baby when I wuz [thirteen?]. Den I didn't stop til I had fohteen chillun. Tell de trufe, Miss, I wuz sorter fast like all de gals and boys ter day. Guess dats how I had chillun so fast. No, I ain't slo' 'bout nothin' I do's.

Library of Congress

"You know, I quit mah fust husband. I wuz sorter crazy 'bout him at fust, but aftah awhile I found out 4 married life wusn't whut I thought for, so I quit 'im. I stuck wid 'im til all [dese?] chillun wuz growed up. Den I lef'. No when he jound me, I didn't hab no chillun, and he sho to God won't goin' ter lef' me wid none. I and him just couldn't git long. I couldn't sarve de Lawd stayin' so worried up, so I just quit. Mah chillun finally died, 'scusin' Liza [heah?]. She's mah baby, and she is twenty-foh.

"I didn't have no spechil trainin' for mah wuk, 'scusin' whut I got from de doctors and 'sperience. Dat's de best anyhow, all de teaching in de world don't hep you none lessen you sho 'nuff catch a baby. De fust time sorter scites you, but aftah day hit comes easy. Why, Miss, I cotched mah fust baby when I wuz fohteen years old, and hit wuz my mammy's, and a gal. I allus wuz curious bout things lak dat and as I done told you I wuz sorter fast like, and I got ter followin' doctors round and just thing youse know I wuz cotchin' babies too.

"I don't never has any truble, well not but once. I had a white gal patient. Lawsy, she wuz a sight. I wrasseled wid her fer twenty-foh' hours. De baby did come though, and hit wuz all right 'cept sorter slo' bout ketchin' its bref, so I holds it up and spansks, and, God, how it did holler. Dat galls pa, he sont fer me. We lived on his place and he thought dey 5 couldn't do nothin' witout me.

Looking down at herself, she said, "Miss, I'se sho don't look lak dis when I'm on a case. I has white uniforms, and I wears them when I knows head o'time. Sometimes though, dey don't give you time to hardly git anything on. Hurry calls, you know. Most in general dey speaks ter you and engages you when dey has been cotched 'bout foh months.

"Dey pays you five dollars down in 'vance. Den when de time comes dey is sposed to pay de [balance?]. Course now if anything happens for instance, I gits sick or go away — den I's sposed to refund de five dollars. No, I don't [evah?] send fer a doctor, less ob course sumpin' happens dat I ain't spectin'. Fust thing I does when I goes on a case, I 'xamine

Library of Congress

dem ter see if de baby is coming straight, if it ain't I sends for de doctor. And I allus keeps a doctor spotted in case ob trouble.

She paused in her conversation to pick up a little baby who had come from an adjoining apartment.

"Here comes mah baby" she said. "She thinks I'se her mammy." And still talking to the child she said, "Honey, tell whut yer been doin' a'day. Been havin' ter cook and wuk hard. Well, lay yo little [haid?] down and take yourself a little nap while I holds yer. "

Gently shaking the child on her knees, she continued, "I loves chillun, but, Lawd, ain't dey lots ob trouble.

6

Yer nevah know whut yer bringin' 'em in dis world fer. Der's Liza in dere, she's just out ob de stockade, and dat sorry husband in dere too. Dey wuz sont up fer fightin' each odder.

"Goin' back ter whut I wuz sayin', my biggest trouble in bein' a granny is I'm fast and I wants things to move off fast too. Why, when I had mah fohteen, I didn't have ter hab but a pain or two and dere de younguns wuz.

"Dey ain't lak dat though. Some haf' ter be coaxed and petted long - but for me - I wuz allus rarin' ter go. I sho had a time wid my last patient. She wuz young and high-strung and look lak she won't nevah gwine haf dat baby, but atter while she calmed down and got ter work. Most ob my patients is been dere befo' so dey knows how ter do.

"Law no, Honey, I don't fool wid politics, don't knows nothin' bout dem. I guess I'se religious long as folks don't make me mad. I goes ter church once a month, but jus let somebody cross me up and I cusses lak hell.

Looking up the street, Maria suddenly became alarmed. Quickly she called to Jake. "Better git back in dere quick, son dere comes de vacancy cop." Then to me - "Dem cops is jus

Library of Congress

been runnin' wild roun' here ter day. I thinks dey is wrong, but we had to have laws, and it's de cop's place to enforce 'em.

“And so Jake hasn't a job?” I said.

“No, mam, he ain't been out'er de stockade very long for beatin' his wife.” And speaking again to Jake in an 7 anxious tone of voice, “Son, don't you speck you better git out and git youself a job? I don't wants yer in any mo' trouble”. Maria rambled on about the trials and tribulations of married life and raising a family of no-count chillun.

“John, I b'lieve I told yer is my second husband. He's lots olderin' than I is. He's seventy-six. Oh, I likes him very well. He ain't able ter do any hard wuk. He jus sorter wuks de garden and piddles round de house a little. He had foh younguns himself when he married me, but I couldn't fall out bout dat, case I had fohteen myself. I has to do de thinkin' and wukin' at dis house, but den dats my life. John's old and harmless. Den, too, it's sorter nice ter have somebody ter ball out when I gits mad.

“Dere comes de polishy man and I ain't got no money fer him. I declare if de storks don't git busy I don't know whut is ter become ob de grannies.

“Good evenin', “ she said to the insurance collector. “No, sir, I jus ain't got you no money dis time, but jus gimme til next week. I think I got a case dat I hopes will pay me well. I'll sho hab yo'r money next time.

Seating herself again, she began to express her sentiments in no uncertain terms about the young people.

“[Young?] folks is so [trifin'?). Dey oughter be prayin', gittin' ready ter die, but dey ain't. Dey's live wires, jus runin' round de country gittin' babies who don't know 8 who's dey daddies, causin' so much trouble.

Library of Congress

Speaking to the others, she said, "Say is anybody listin' to dat radio? Turn it off. Dis lady cain't hear her ears.

"Don't turn it off on my account, Marie", I said. "I must be going."

"Well, I sho has enjoyed talking to you, and say, Miss, if you knows ob anybody who needs a granny, please ter let me know.